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Enterprise-wide eAuthentication Goes Live

On October 19th, 2003, USDA launched its enterprise-wide eAuthentication service. USDA is one of the first Federal Agencies to implement such a centralized authentication tool. This new service will help fulfill the expanding eGovernment Initiative of the President's Management Agenda and assist USDA and all Federal Agencies in meeting the Government Paperwork Elimination Act (GPEA) requirement for providing electronic options for customers doing business with the Government. This new government-wide service is available to all Federal Agencies.

USDA leveraged the existing Web-based Centralized Authentication and Authorization Facility (WebCAAF) to provide an efficient and cost-effective solution rather than building a new system. It was developed to be scalable as agencies bring additional applications online in the coming months. This enterprise-wide effort to build upon the original WebCAAF authentication infrastructure developed by the Farm Service Agency (FSA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Rural Development (RD) was coordinated through the USDA Office of the Chief Information Officer (OCIO) and included active participation from all USDA agencies.

Currently, several USDA agencies, including the National Agricultural Statistic Service (NASS), Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), Forest Service (FS), Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS), and Rural Development (RD), are integrating new applications with the eAuthentication service. The NASS Electronic Data Reporting (EDR) application, for example, enables more efficient workflow processing and provides customers with electronic alternatives for conducting their business with NASS. The agency plans to add EDR to their list of services by allowing respondents to complete and submit surveys online.

USDA continues to participate actively in the General Services Administration (GSA) led eAuthentication Presidential Initiative. GSA has recently decided to change the government-wide effort's direction and will pursue a more decentralized approach than the "GSA Gateway." How this change will impact the overall timeline remains unclear, but USDA will play a significant role in this new model, offering the knowledge and experience gained from our own eAuthentication initiative. Look for updates in the forthcoming eAuthentication postcards.

For more information on eAuthentication, please visit:
http://www.eauth.egov.usda.gov

USDA Partners with OPM for Enterprise-wide LMS

On October 24th, 2003, USDA proudly announced its new partnership with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and Go-Learn.gov to implement its enterprise-wide Learning Management System (LMS) in support of the eTraining Initiative--one of the 24 Presidential Initiatives that supports the President's Management Agenda.

A team of USDA agency staff selected Plateau, a GoLearn.gov commercial partner, to develop the Department's LMS. During the October 27th kick-off meeting with senior leadership, Scott Charbo, Chief Information Officer, said "This is the first one [initiative] we're moving forward on, so this is a big deal. It's not only a matter of saving costs, but also increasing opportunities for users." This system will serve as the platform for all USDA agencies to launch eLearning tools, and as a tool for the Department to manage its human capital development activities, including all classroom and online training. According to Ruthie Jackson, Director of the USDA Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM), "As we move forward in our technological advances, it is crucial that we continue our partnership from a human resources perspective. eLearning coupled with a LMS is changing the way we do business."

The development of the LMS is underway. The services will be delivered to agencies in a series of phases. The first of these phases will launch in early 2004 and will include 12 agencies with a total of approximately 10,000 users. USDA's new eLearning approach eliminates the need for single agency systems and will lead to significant reduction in training-related travel costs and duplicative agency services.

The vision of the President's eTraining Initiative is to create a premier eLearning environment that supports development of the Federal workforce through simplified and one-stop access to high quality products and services. This enhanced training capability will, in turn, advance the accomplishment of agency missions.

For more information on the eLearning LMS, please contact the eGovernment Team.

New eGovernment Administrator Shares Goals

Karen Evans, the Office of Budget and Management (OMB)'s new Administrator of eGovernment and Information Technology (IT) suggested that she will take a somewhat different tack than the one

chosen by her predecessor, Mark Forman. Evans, who came to OMB after spending 18 months as the CIO of the Energy Department, said she wants to lead agencies in building consensus around the IT management practices Forman instituted in 2001.

Evans suggested that her new position is similar to her role as vice chair of the CIO Council. In her previous post, Evans led agencies as they worked through a multitude of issues relevant to the CIOs. One colleague, Ira Hobbs, USDA's Deputy CIO and co-chair of the CIO Council's Human Capital for IT Committee, stated in the Government Computer News (09/08/03), "Evans is in the right position at the right time. She is a real implementer. Mark did a good job in choosing Karen." Having worked closely with Forman on many issues such as the development of the Federal Enterprise Architecture, the consolidation of hardware and software purchases and the use of business cases to justify Agency IT budgets, Evans stated that she will continue to drive the eGovernment Agenda with fervor and fully intends to meet key Presidential eGovernment Initiatives goals by 2004.

During a press conference earlier this month, Evans outlined her keys to tackling eGovernment challenges:

- Widespread communication about eGovernment and the Federal Enterprise Architecture to agencies, Congress, state and local governments and citizens;
- Continued commitment from agency leaders to focus on citizens; and
- Cooperation with industry.

"The solutions from the eGovernment projects must become a part of the way the government does business everyday," says Evans. She remains convinced that these initiatives will simplify processes and unify work across Federal Agencies and within the lines of business of the government. Still, Evans and others acknowledge that cooperation beyond traditional boundaries among Federal Agencies, OMB and Congress will be critical in moving the 24 Presidential eGovernment Initiatives forward. USDA is currently participating in 20 of the 24 Presidential Initiatives.

For more information on Karen Evans and OMB's eGovernment leadership, please contact the eGovernment Team.

Rural Communities Receive Broadband Grants

Urban communities rely heavily on high-speed Internet services for personal, business and safety reasons. This capability allows citizens and businesses to communicate anywhere, anytime and at a lower cost than ever before. Until recently, these services were either limited or not available to many rural communities, despite the demand for high-speed access.

On September 24th, 2003, in an effort to expand these critical services to rural areas, USDA Secretary Ann Veneman awarded $11.3 million in broadband community grants to 34 communities in 20 states. Like many of the 56 million residents in the 2,305 counties that comprise rural America, these communities currently lack basic connectivity to hospitals and schools, including essential emergency connectivity for police and fire protection. The Community-Oriented Connectivity Broadband (Community Connect) Grant Program, supplemented by RD's standard high-speed telecommunications loan program, enables rural communities to provide residents with high-speed Internet access. As a

result, these citizens will now be able to take advantage of new opportunities such as online training, technical assistance, and other educational programs.

Additionally, USDA, through the Rural Utilities Service (RUS), plays a critical role in expanding the capability of all citizens to benefit from eGovernment, especially those in rural communities. "Critical infrastructure is the backbone of a strong economy and this investment will help enhance educational opportunities, improve access to health care, increase public safety and accelerate economic development," said RUS Administrator Hilda Legg. In addition to these efforts, RUS continues to lead the Federal Rural Wireless Outreach Initiative. In conjunction with the Federal Communications Commission Wireless Telecommunications Bureau (FCC-WTB) and private industry, RUS drives this effort to implement programs that encourage greater access and deployment of high-speed and wireless services throughout rural America.

For more information on broadband grants, please contact the eGovernment Team.

Forest Service Launches Foliage Hotline

In September, USDA's Forest Service (FS) activated its toll-free hotline to provide national forest visitors with weekly updates on fall foliage color changes throughout the country. FS manages 133,087 miles of recreational trails and 136 scenic byways to guide visitors along nature's corridors. Statistics show an estimated 350 million visits annually to national forests, grasslands and prairies, many of them to see the colors of autumn. "The Forest Service is pleased to once again provide its hotline as a valuable service to the thousands of people who visit our nation's forests each autumn to see this marvel of nature," said FS Chief Dale Bosworth.

The peak season for fall viewing in national forests began in September and continues through early November. FS officials indicate that summer weather conditions experienced this year (high rainfall levels in the east) are not expected to influence the timing and intensity of leaf color. The toll-free fall color hotline can be accessed through mid- November at (800) 354-4595. Callers are greeted with an automated voice system and can hear weekly updates on peak color in different regions of the country. Last year more than 30,000 people called the hotline. Fall foliage information is also available at the Forest Service's Website: http://www.fs.fed.us/news/fallcolors/. These services represent just one example of USDA's efforts to provide citizens with convenient access to appropriate information and services through eGovernment tools and technologies.

For more information on the foliage hotline, please contact the eGovernment Team.

For more information on any of these topics, or for general comments or questions, contact the eGovernment Team at:
- **Phone: (202) 720-6144**
- **eMail: egov@usda.gov**
- **Web: www.egov.usda.gov**